

never halted the flow of aid to that country. Guatemala will now, nevertheless, gain the prestige of being a U.S. ally when it comes to the drug war, when the whole process is actually a sham. Alongside similar actions against Burma and Haiti, the State Department's Bureau for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs (INL) announced its original decertification decision last January, which was a reflection on the escalating ineffectiveness of Guatemala's counter-narcotics efforts, as a result of President Alfonso Portillo's lackluster performance. The quantity of drugs seized by the Guatemalan government, which was rising annually until Portillo took office, plummeted in 2000 to only 13 percent of the amount seized the year before. In 2002 the Guatemalan police reportedly embezzled more than twice the quantity of drugs than they confiscated. The government's patently spurious commitment to the UN-brokered 1996 peace accords was also cited as a basis for Washington's decision to decertify last January. By its present action, the Bush administration graphically shows Latin America that when it comes to Washington's much touted war against drugs, there is no doubt that trade comes first.

WHITE HOUSE HOPES TO CHANGE GUATEMALA'S WAYS

In his briefing on the president's certification determination, INL Acting Assistant Secretary Paul Simons observed that last year's "suspension of assistance to Guatemala would result in further deterioration of precisely those Guatemalan institutions that are essential to combating the influence of organized crime." As a result, the State Department decided that, despite its decision to decertify Guatemala, financial sanctions that would normally accompany such a decision would not be exercised because they would only further undermine the country's already highly delicate democratic institutions.

More directly, President Bush's decision to rescind last January's largely symbolic decertification will be an obvious effort to woo Guatemala, which has the region's largest population and economy, into supporting a Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA). CAFTA is a prototype of Washington's Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) scheme, which has been one of its highest priorities, and because of Guatemala's economic significance, it is a prime target for Washington's courtship. As a result, Bush's drug war is being crucified on the cross of free trade. Thus, it comes as no surprise that the Bush administration would not permit a small matter like Guatemala's abysmal drug interdiction record of late to jeopardize the achievement of CAFTA. As negotiations for the trade pact continue, Washington has also received criticism for not pursuing strong labor and environmental regulations as part of its core.

CAFTA: IS IT WORTH THE SACRIFICE?

To the chagrin of some in Washington, Guatemala's Constitutional Court recently gave former dictator Efraín Ríos Montt its blessing to run for the presidency despite a constitutional provision that bars all coup participants from doing so. Ríos Montt rose to power during a military coup in March 1982 and promptly set about a "scorched earth" campaign, murdering thousands of Mayan peasants. U.S. Ambassador to Guatemala John R. Hamilton has publicly warned that U.S. relations with Guatemala would be compromised if Ríos Montt made his way back to power. Still, in the face of reaching a free trade accord, the recertification of Guatemala reveals the true stripes of Washington's foreign policy, and the insignificance it accords to the anti-drug war and the

rising human rights toll in Guatemala. In the name of Washington's free trade blitzkrieg, the White House has sacrificed the integrity of its professedly unwavering commitment to fight corruption and drugs in the very same Central American countries in which it allegedly endeavors to expand democracy, while promoting its all-important trade accord.

MORE HOLES THAN SWISS CHEESE IN WHITE HOUSE RECERTIFICATION OF GUATEMALA

On Monday, September 15, the White House, using doctored information and skimpy statistics, recommended to Congress the recertification of Guatemala, reversing a Bush administration decision made last January in response to the dramatic evidence of Guatemala's failure to meaningfully cooperate with Washington's anti-drug efforts. Recertification would normally qualify the newly reaccredited country to receive U.S. financial aid. However, for Guatemala, it remains a largely symbolic action, since Washington originally had waived all sanctions against the country, maintaining the flow of bilateral aid in the interest of preserving what meager anti-narcotics operations that remain active in the country. Shortly after the original decertification, 21 members of the U.S. Congress asserted that, until Guatemala was recertified as the result of a dramatically improved drug interdiction record, they would not vote to ratify the Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA).

In his Monday memorandum to the State Department President Bush, using self-obfuscating language, touted Guatemala's "willingness to better its counternarcotics practices," but shied away from coming forth with any evidence to support it. Instead, the country was merely omitted from a section of the memorandum listing nations that had "failed demonstrably . . . to adhere to their obligations under international counternarcotics agreements." Whereas Guatemala, Haiti and Myanmar had been blacklisted in January, only the latter two remained in the September 15 statement. The Bush administration, understandably sheepish when it came to recertifying Guatemala only months after decertifying it, and with no tangible evidence to justify doing so, camouflaged the announcement in the memorandum, hoping not to draw too much attention to its actions. The underhanded nature of this decision represents a massive downgrading of the authenticity of both Washington's and Guatemala's supposed anti-drug efforts. Guatemala would certainly not qualify for certification if actually put to even a minimally objective test. In making its determination, Washington proved once again that its certification process was little better than a total sham.

A WHITE HOUSE DECEPTION

Since the White House decertified Guatemala last January, the DEA observed that the country had become the "preferred Central American location for storage and consolidation of drug loads," and boats and light aircraft regularly bring drugs into the country. The official White House report had to acknowledge that Guatemala's alleged improvements were only the "initial steps" that had to be taken and the "permanence of these improvements had yet to be determined." In other words, no significant steps have been made to curtail the flow of narcotics through Guatemala. Meanwhile, the White House is concerned mainly with fulfilling its free trade aspirations in Central America and realizes that they would not likely be achieved if Guatemala remains uncertified. Thus ignoring the true deficiency of Guatemala's anti-drug efforts, the Bush administration is trying to slyly sweep its failed anti-drug campaign in the country

under the rug, caricaturing the entire certification process just as the Clinton administration did with Mexico in 1997. As with the present Bush administration, free trade logistics, specifically the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), rather than a faithful evaluation of that country's anti-drug performance, were the order of the day.

President Bush expects "Guatemala to continue its efforts and to demonstrate further progress in the coming year," apparently hoping that recertification will self-prophetically lead to increased cooperation with his war on drugs, a trend he claims erroneously in the memorandum has already been manifest in the recent attitude of Guatemalan authorities. Interestingly, only hours before the White House announcement, Guatemalan officials announced that they had just seized record quantities of drugs, perhaps hoping to gull some ingenuos into believing that interdictions had reacquired past levels. Suspiciously, no arrests had been made, nor statistics cited, to reinforce this claim. Some allege that previously seized drugs had been recycled and "seized" again to create the false pretense of successful interdiction.

By spinning the facts of Guatemala's performance (pointing to the country's supposedly renewed dedication to counter-narcotics efforts) and continuing to use the certification process as a political weapon, the White House risks further disenchanting its remaining hemispheric allies in its fading war against drug traffickers.

TRIBUTE TO DR. PAUL SMITH

HON. SCOTT MCINNIS

OF COLORADO

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, October 2, 2003

Mr. MCINNIS. Mr. Speaker, I rise before this body of Congress and this nation today to pay tribute to an outstanding citizen from my district. Dr. Paul Smith of Pueblo West, Colorado is a dedicated physician who has worked tirelessly to improve the care given to our veterans. An alumnus of Colorado State University—Pueblo, Paul is being recognized by that institution with their award for Outstanding Service to the University, and I am honored to recognize his achievements here today.

Paul was instrumental in the creation of the Eastern Colorado Health Care System, which merged with the Southern Colorado Health System of the Veterans Administration and the Denver VA Medical Center. He serves as the Associate Chief of Staff for Community-Based Care, where he is responsible for overseeing seven Veterans Administration clinics in central and southern Colorado. In addition to his dedication to our nation's veterans, Paul has remained active in the Colorado State University—Pueblo community by serving on search and screening committees, advising on the restructuring of the Student Health Services, and donating his time to the university's health clinic.

Mr. Speaker, Paul Smith is the kind of dedicated and devoted citizen who makes our communities a better place. His tireless work has improved the lives of countless veterans and members of the community at large. I am honored to join with my colleagues in paying tribute to Paul Smith here today. I wish him all the best in his future endeavors.